

Book review: Domestic mandala: architecture of lifeworlds in Nepal. By J. Gray. Aldershot: Ashgate 2006. ISBN 0-754-64538-X

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Domestic mandala: architecture of lifeworlds in Nepal. By J. Gray. Aldershot: Ashgate. 2006. xvi + 163 pp. £45.00 hardback. ISBN 0 754 645 38 X

Domestic Mandala, part of a series linking anthropological theory, cultural history and religious studies, focuses on the cosmological significance of houses (traditional and modern) in the Kholagaun hamlet in the village of Banaspati, Kathmandu. The concept of homology is central to the discussion: the human body relates to the house as the house relates to the cosmos.

The different spatial modalities of the house demonstrate this: the mandalic (concentric spaces around a centre) and yantric (cardinal directions and auspicious rituals) are underpinned by the foundational myth of Purusha, the cosmic being integral to sacred geometry.

Does Gray show that this system or philosophy is a conscious way of being for people, rather than an external construct imposed by the anthropologist? Utilizing excerpts and producing vignettes from fieldnotes, Gray reveals that the householders self-identify as having a lifestyle defined by dharma (which itself articulates the relation between an individual's stage of life and worldly duty). Particularly interesting is the analysis of marriage rites which, it is argued, are ritual as performance.

Indeed the notion of an embodied way of knowing is crucial to the argument that truth is made manifest through paradoxical attachment and detachment. That is, the process of building, the configuration of the built form, and everyday domestic activities are revelatory.

Gray highlights the importance of boundaries to Nepalese thinking, and ideas of purity and impurity are key here. Disembodied ghosts haunt liminal spaces, while women external to the family might be perceived as a potential threat to the house. Moreover, conceptions of pure and impure affect everyday rituals such as the preparation of rice, in terms of physical location and participants.

Ultimately, Gray is concerned with how to express, in an analytic ethnography, what he terms the 'lifeworld', the unspoken dimension of social life.

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A war of images. By Stephen M. Norris. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press. 2006. 291 pp. \$40.00. cloth. ISBN: 0-87580-363-6.

This interesting monograph explores what the author calls 'Russian visual nationhood.' Specifically, it is a study of how *lubok* illustrations (cheap and colorful bastwood prints long popular among Russia's lower classes) depicted – and propagandized for – Russian military campaigns, from the Napoleonic invasion of 1812 down to the Second World War. Challenging arguments of Geoffrey Hosking and others that a sense of nationhood in Russia was traditionally only weakly developed, or indeed absent altogether, Norris insists that the articulation of identity was a constant and pervasive process. His point is well taken and certainly well demonstrated, although given the intensely patriotic nature of the evidence he considers one could hardly have expected differently. He traces how the iconography of